Book Review

From the Divine to the Human, by Frithjof Schuon

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The author states in the preface that he is writing from the standpoint of metaphysics. Now it goes without saying that what is metaphysical, "beyond nature" in the sense of transcendence, is thereby metapsychic, or soul-transcending, which leads us by contrast to recall once again[1] Jung's remark that the soul is the object of psychology and unfortunately also its subject. In other words, for want of being metaphysical, the standpoint of modern psychology—which is all that Jung is referring to—is unfortunately psychic and not metapsychic. On the contrary, insofar as the soul is the object of Schuon's consideration, his writings entirely escape the misfortune referred to by Jung. Moreover, as regards this particular book, the title is there to assure us that the human individual will not be approached from the side, that is, from its own level, but from above.

In a more general respect also the title proclaims in advance the great importance of the book—one can even say its necessity. We live in a world which for the last hundred years and more has been largely dominated by an idea which might be expressed "from the subhuman to the human". To that error this masterpiece comes as a devastating refutation.

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[1] See our review of Schuon's *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy* in the Autumn 1976 number of this journal.

The unusual power of the author's attack can be partly accounted for by a remark he has made elsewhere. "The individualistic and sentimental argumentation with which traditional piety operates has lost almost all its power to pierce consciences, and the reason for this is not merely that modern man is irreligious but also that the usual religious arguments, through not probing sufficiently to the depth of things, and not having had any need to do so, are psychologically somewhat outworn and fail to satisfy certain needs of causality. If human societies degenerate on the one hand with the passage of time, they accumulate on the other hand experience in virtue of old age, however intermingled with errors their experience may be; this paradox is something that any pastoral teaching bent on efficacy should take into account, not by drawing new directives from the general error but on the contrary by using arguments of a higher order, intellectual rather than sentimental".[2]

The author's own practice of what he preaches is a marked characteristic of his writing as a whole, and of this new book in particular; and some outstanding examples of his "arguments of a higher order" are to be found in the first chapter, "Consequences Flowing from the Mystery of Subjectivity":

> Nothing is more absurd than to have intelligence derive from matter, hence the greater from the lesser; the evolutionary leap from matter to intelligence is from every point of view the most inconceivable thing that could be.… Starting from the recognition of the immediately tangible mystery of subjectivity or intelligence, we can easily understand that the origin of the Universe is not inert and unconscious matter but a spiritual Substance which, from coagulation to coagulation and from segmentation to segmentation—and other projections both manifesting and limiting—finally produces matter by causing it to emerge from a substance which, though more subtle than it, is already remote from the principial Substance.

Readers may remember in this connection a remarkable passage where the author elsewhere refers to the inverse process, that is, the reabsorption of matter into Spirit, with reference to the "cloud" which hid Christ from sight[3] when his Ascension had reached a certain level.

Another powerful argument lies in the fact that "the ideas of the 'Great Spirit' and the primacy of the Invisible are natural to man, a fact which does not need to be demonstrated" and that "what is natural to human consciousness proves *ipso facto* its essential truth inasmuch as the intelligence exists for no other reason than to be adequate to reality". Analogously we could say that the existence of the ear proves the existence of sound; or as the author himself remarks: "We have heard it said that the wings of birds prove the existence of air, and that in the same way the

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[2] *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, pp. 53-4.

[3] *Ibid*., p. 53.

religious phenomenon, common *a priori* to all peoples, proves the existence of its content, namely God and the afterlife; which is to the point if one takes the trouble to examine the argument in depth". The symbolism here is in itself illuminating, for religion gives man "wings" and the air in question is the domain of the Transcendent for which those wings are made and the reality of which they "prove". It is true that such proofs are, as the author says "inaccessible to certain minds"; but he gives also arguments of common sense such as might convince some of those who are not—or not yet—open to demonstrations on a higher plane.

> Those who uphold the evolutionist argument of an intellectual progress like to explain religious and metaphysical ideas by inferior psychological factors, such as fear of the unknown, childish hope of a perpetual happiness, attachment to an imagery that has become dear, escape into dreams, the desire to oppress others at small expense, et cetera; how can one fail to see that such suspicions, presented shamelessly as demonstrated facts, comprise psychological inconsequences and impossibilities, which cannot escape any impartial observer? If humanity was stupid for thousands of years, one cannot explain how it could have ceased being so, especially since this is supposed to have happened in a relatively very short space of time; and one can explain it still less when one observes with what intelligence and heroism it was stupid for so long and with what philosophic myopia and moral decadence it has finally become "lucid" and "adult".

The book is divided into three parts, "Subjectivity and Knowledge", "Divine and Universal Order", and "Human World". In part one the first chapter on the general significance of subjectivity is followed by a more analytical chapter entitled "Aspects of the Theophanic Phenomenon of Consciousness" which throws light on certain facts that are imperfectly understood, largely through unconscious prejudice. Having mentioned what man has in common with animals, the author adds: "What belongs to man alone is the Intellect opened onto the Absolute, and thereby also reason which prolongs the Intellect in the direction of relativity; and in consequence, the capacity for integral knowledge, for sacralization and ascension". But it would be a mistake to suppose that what we share with animals is not different in them from what it is in us. Taking sexuality as an example, and having remarked that it is "animal in animals and human in men", he adds: "To say that it is human means in practice that it demands spiritualization, hence interiorization and sacramentalization; human sexuality is specifically and pejoratively animal when man wishes it so, but not in the framework of what is truly human, which is spiritual".

The final chapter of part one is "Transcendence is Not Contrary to Sense". In it some widespread faults of thinking are traced back to their causes. At the outset the author puts his fingers on the main difficulty which faces the theologian, namely "the mystery of relativity, not only the relativity of the world but also—and *a priori*—that of the personal aspect of the Divinity". Whatever the scope of his own particular intelligence may be, the theologian has a

heavy exoteric responsibility. He must in fact "avoid at all costs, on the one hand placing one or several gods beside God, and on the other hand introducing into God a scission, which would amount more or less to the same thing; the Divine Nature has to remain simple, just as the Divine Reality has to remain One, notwithstanding the undeniable complexity of the Divine Mystery". In a word, it is not possible to put before the religious majority the notion that the Personal God or God the Creator is transcendable. But while recognizing the needs of that majority, this chapter is above all concerned with safeguarding the rights of man's theomorphic intelligence, made to perceive the Divine Truth in all its complex hierarchy by being itself a complex hierarchy. In fallen man this subjective complexity is simplified and stunted; fallen intelligences, no longer adequate to their supreme object, tend to be unaware of the hierarchy of the Divine Aspects. From this there is only one step to denying the rights of the primordial intelligence to perceive what it, the fallen intelligence, is unable to see. Schuon very amply vindicates these rights; but having done so he expresses, with regard to Beyond-Being, that is, the Transpersonal Divine Essence, an all-important truth, which might in fact be capable of appeasing and reconciling those of the dogmatists who have the humility to admit their own intellectual limitations and the aspiration to overcome them:

> Concerning the transcendence of Beyond-Being, it is necessary to emphasize that in reality this transcendence is absolute plenitude, so that it could not possibly have a privative meaning: to say that the Trinity is surpassed therein means, not that the Trinity is abolished in its essentials, but that it is comprised—and prefigured in respect of its ontological or hypostatic projection—in Beyond Being in a way which, while being undifferentiated, is eminently positive; in the same way as the Vedantic *Sat-Chit-Ananda* which, although it corresponds to an already relative vision, is nonetheless ineffably and supereminently comprised in the pure absoluteness of *Atmâ*.

This truth of truths is taken up again and developed in part two, in the opening chapter on "The Interplay of the Hypostases". But here the positive and totally undeprived plenitude of the Essence is considered more in its aspect of Beginning than of End, for the theme is not that of ultimate reintegration but of the reverse process of the manifestation of the relative from the Absolute.

> Infinitude and Perfection are intrinsic dimensions of the Absolute; but they also affirm themselves "descendingly" and in view of cosmogonic manifestation, in which case it could be said that Perfection of the Good is the "image" of the Absolute produced by Radiation, thus in virtue of the Infinite. It is here that the Divine *Mâyâ* intervenes, Relativity *in divinis*: whereas on the one hand the Absolute by definition possesses Infinitude and Perfection, on the other hand—in virtue of the Relativity necessarily implied by the Infinite—the Absolute gives

> rise to an operative Infinitude and to a manifested Good; thus to a hypostatic hierarchy, "descending" and ultimately "creative".

In what follows, the Hypostases are considered in their mutual relationships, with reference first of all to the Vedantine Ternary and then to the Christian Trinity. Many readers will no doubt agree with the reviewer that this is the most illuminating exposition of the Trinity that they have ever read, and that the author has indeed pronounced, as it were, the last word on the Orthodox–Catholic controversy about the procession of the Holy Ghost, as to whether it proceeds from the Father alone or from the Son also.

The chapter ends with a reference to Islam: "For Christians, to say that God is one means nothing unless it be added that God is three; for Muslims, to say that He is three amounts to denying that He is one". But let us quote also from the concluding paragraph:

> Both conceptions—the unitary and the trinitary—meet and are resolved in their archetype, which is none other than the immutable and radiating Absolute; being what It is, the Absolute cannot not be immutable, and It cannot not radiate. Immutability, or fidelity to Itself, and Radiation, or gift of Itself; there lies the essence of all that is.

There follows a remarkable chapter on "The Problem of Possibility" which makes clear the different meanings of the possible and the necessary at various levels, starting from the absolute Necessity and infinite Possibility of the Essence which is Beyond-Being.

The third and last chapter of part two is entitled "Structure and Universality of the Conditions of Existence". The five conditions in question are matter, form, number, space and time. "Matter extends—starting from its basis, ether—from extreme subtlety to extreme solidity; one could also say: from substantiality to accidentality. Form evolves—starting from the sphere—between perfect simplicity and indefinite complexity; and number goes from unity to totality. Space goes from the ungraspable point to limitless extension; and time, from the instant to perpetuity. Each of these bases of departure, with its indefinite unfolding, offers an image of the supreme Principle realizing its potentialities in the mysterious direction of relativity or contingency; but at the same time, this unfolding itself testifies in its own way to the intrinsic Infinitude and to the hypostatic modes of God".

The author goes on to point out that each of these conditions has an objective and a subjective aspect. Having mentioned the three dimensions of objective space, he adds: "In subjective space, by contrast, there is a centre and a periphery—the subject itself and the limits of its experience—and one distinguishes between what is above and below, in front and behind, to the right and to the left". Of particular interest is the symbolism of the subjective aspects of

the conditions, and by way of example let us quote what is said about the three subjective dimensions of time,[4] namely the past, the present and the future:

> Positively, the past refers to the origin, to primordial and normative perfection, to the "lost Paradise", it evokes in consequence the virtue of fidelity; negatively, it evokes immaturity transcended, imperfection conquered, the "world" abandoned for God. Positively, the future signifies the goal, the ideal to be realized, the Paradise to be gained, it thus evokes the virtue of hope; negatively, it is the forgetting of the origin, infidelity to the primordial norm, the loss of innocent and happy childhood. It is the positive sense which prevails here in fact, just as it is the negative sense that prevails for the past; for "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" and "let the dead bury their dead".
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> As for the present, it is, negatively, forgetting the Origin as well as the Goal, hence attachment to the moment—forever fleeting—of present pleasure; but positively, the present signifies the virtue of faith, which determines both the virtue of hope and that of fidelity, the one not going without the other, just as there is no past without future, and conversely.

This quotation, which concerns one condition only, may serve to give a general idea of the fascination of this particular part of the chapter. But when we read on, we realize that we are proceeding from a mere antechamber to a yet vaster treasury of correspondences. The author now reminds us of the Divine roots of the different conditions, and from there, true as always to the title of the book, he takes us to the human microcosm. Finally, having included in this context the arts as prolongations of man, he shows us the conditions in their highest aspects, that is, as projections or reflections of the Essence itself which determines them in three different ways inasmuch as It is Absolute Infinite Perfection.

Part three, "Human World", opens with an "Outline of a Spiritual Anthropology". This chapter-heading—and with it, implicitly, the imperative need for the book as a whole—is explained as follows:

> All "anthropology" depends on a "theology" in the sense that every science of man must prolong a science of God, for: "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness". To speak of a "spiritual anthropology" is already a pleonasm—to say man is to say spirit—but it is justified in a world which, having forgotten the divine, can no longer know what is human.

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[4] As to objective time, it "involves four phases, the most striking examples of which are the four seasons of the year", but he gives other examples such as "childhood, youth, maturity, old age".

To give briefly, at the risk of simplification, the essence of this chapter, we could say that since God is—absolutely, infinitely and perfectly—Knowledge, Love and Power, man necessarily personifies these qualities in relative and finite perfection, and they can be identified respectively with intelligence, sentiment and will.

> In our heart, the elements knowledge, love and power—or intelligence, sentiment and will—are combined as so many dimensions of one and the same deiform subjectivity. But…we can consider the heart as the region of the will alone as soon as we attribute intelligence to the mind and sentiment to the soul, in which case our perspective is more outward; and we can do so all the more rightly because, in a certain respect, the will is identified with the subject, with the individual who 'wills'; who wills because he loves.… From the heart-intellect come knowledge and love, but it is not with the heart that we are able to think and feel; by contrast, it is with the heart—with pure subjectivity—that we are able to concentrate our spirit, and that is why we say that the will in general and concentration in particular pertain to the heart, even though in its depths it is not limited to this function and possesses equally and *a priori* knowledge and love.

Of the intelligence considered in itself he says: "Normally and primordially, human intelligence realizes a perfect equilibrium between the intelligence of the brain and that of the heart: the first is the rational capacity with the diverse abilities attached thereto; the second is intellectual or spiritual intuition, or in other words it is that eschatological realism which permits one to choose the saving truth even apart from any mental speculation. Cardiac intelligence, even when reduced to its minimum is always right; it is from this that faith is derived whenever it is profound and unshakeable and such is the intelligence of a great number of saints. Nevertheless, the absolute norm or the ideal is the plenitude—not the sufficient minimum—of cardiac intelligence and the perfect expansion of dialectical intelligence".

Let us quote also what he says of the origin, within the subject, of the complementarity spirit-soul:

> The Absolute "radiates" by virtue of its intrinsic "dimension" of Infinitude, which brings about "the springing forth" of Mâyâ, which itself both contains and produces reflections, worlds, beings: it is thus that one must distinguish a fundamental separation within the human subject, namely the complementarity spirit and soul; the first element belonging to the universal order, and the second constituting the individuality, hence the Mâyâ of the microcosm.

Having referred the spiritual and psychic aspects of man to their divine archetypes, the author now gives us a chapter on "The Message of the Human Body", in which he says, almost at the outset:

> The human form marks not only the summit of earthly creatures, but also—and for that very reason—the exit from their condition, or from the *Samsâra* as the Buddhists would say. To see man is to see not only the image of God but also a door open towards *Bodhi*, liberating Illumination; or let us say towards a blessed establishment in the divine Nearness.… The animal, which can manifest perfections but not the Absolute, is like a closed door, as it were enclosed in its own perfection; whereas man is like an open door that allows him to escape his limits, which are those of the world rather than his own.

Later, but in the same context, he says:

> As to those animals which are intrinsically noble and which thus lend themselves directly to a positive symbolism, one may wonder whether they are not themselves also theophanies; they are so necessarily, and the same holds true for certain plants, minerals, cosmic or terrestrial phenomena, but in these cases the theomorphism is partial and not integral as in man. The splendor of the stag excludes that of the lion, the eagle cannot be the swan, nor the water lily the rose…only man is the image-synthesis of the Creator, by his possession of the intellect—thus also of reason and language—and by his manifestation of it through his very form.

It is impossible to give here more than a faint impression of the wealth and originality of this remarkable chapter; but having conveyed something of its more general contents, let us quote two passages where the author dwells on particular aspects of the body and in so doing gives us a hint of his powers of perception. The greatness of Schuon as an artist, and especially as a painter of the human form, is clearly related to these powers, and in some measure explained by them:

> One of the most salient characteristics of the human body is the breast, which is a solar symbol, with a difference of accentuation according to sex; noble and glorious radiation in both cases, but manifesting power in the first case and generosity in the second; the power and generosity of pure Being. The heart is the centre of man, and the breast is so to speak the face of the heart: and since the heart-intellect comprises both Knowledge and Love, it is plausible that in the human body this polarization should manifest itself by the complementarity of the masculine and feminine breasts.…
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> The gait of the human being is as evocative as his vertical posture; whereas the animal is horizontal and only advances towards itself—that is, it is enclosed within its own form—man, in advancing, transcends himself, even his forward movement seems vertical, it denotes a pilgrimage towards his Archetype, towards the celestial Kingdom, towards God. The beauty of the front of the human body

indicates on the one hand the nobleness of man"s vocational end, and on the other hand the nobleness of his way of approaching it; it indicates that man directs himself towards God, and that he does so in a manner that is "humanly divine", if one may say so. But the back of the body also has its meaning: it indicates, on the one hand, the noble innocence of the origin, and on the other hand the noble way of leaving behind oneself what has been transcended; it expresses, positively, whence we have come and, negatively, how we turn our backs on what is no longer ourselves. Man comes from God, and he goes towards God; but at the same time he draws away from an imperfection which is no longer his own and draws nearer to a perfection which is not yet his. His "becoming" bears the imprint of a "being; he is that which he becomes, and he becomes that which he is.

It goes without saying that the projection "from the Divine to the human" necessarily implies a movement in the opposite direction—or rather movements, inasmuch as the human being is a multiple entity. One of these reactive vibrations is intellectual discernment. Another, complementary to it, is partially akin to homesickness. An exile, as such, is acutely sensitive to anything that is typically representative of his homeland. The smallest such object may move him in an instant to tears. Now man on earth is an exile, and that which typifies his homeland is, precisely, the sacred. To this sensitivity the author now devotes a whole chapter, which is entitled "The Sense of the Sacred".

> As with intellectual discernment, the sense of the sacred is an adequation to the Real, with the difference however that the knowing subject is then the entire soul and not merely the discriminative intelligence. What the intelligence perceives quasi-mathematically, the soul senses in an as it were musical manner that is both moral and aesthetic; it is immobilized and at the same time vivified by the message of blessed Eternity that the sacred transmits.
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> The sacred is the projection of the celestial Centre into the cosmic periphery, or of the "Motionless Mover" into the flow of things. To feel this concretely is to possess the sense of the sacred, and thereby the instinct of adoration, devotion and submission.… The sense of the sacred is thus the innate consciousness of the presence of God: it is to feel this presence sacramentally in symbols and ontologically in all things ... The sacred is the projection of the Immutable into the mutable; as a result, the sense of the sacred consists not only in perceiving this projection, but also in discovering in things the trace of the Immutable, to the point of not letting oneself be deceived and enslaved by the mutable.… The sense of the sacred, by the very fact that it coincides with devotion, essentially implies dignity: firstly moral dignity, the virtues, and then dignity of bearing, of gesture;

> external comportment, which belongs to the moving periphery, must bear witness in this periphery to the "Motionless Centre".

Let us quote also the following passage, which takes us back to the question of discernment and explains why the higher reaches of the intelligence cannot be fully operative without a basic sense of the sacred:

> There is nothing paradoxical in the idea that man cannot be a metaphysician in the full sense without possessing the sense of the sacred; Plotinus is certainly not the only one to have pointed this out. The reason is not that the intelligence cannot *a priori* perceive the true without the concurrence of moral qualities, but that by itself it is not capable of excluding all possibility of error, inasmuch as errors often have their source in the imperfection of the soul, for man is a whole; it is no less true that, beyond a certain level of perception, the intelligence has need of particular graces which largely depend upon moral qualification in the broadest sense of the term.… Altogether generally, we would say that one cannot enter the sanctuary of truth except in a holy way, and this condition includes above all beauty of character, which is inseparable from the sense of the sacred.

The above quotations are concentrated on the essential aspect of the chapter, but they neglect what the author has to say about the secondary and practical aspects of his theme. The reader will find some remarkable passages on rites and ceremonies, on liturgical art, and on miracles, all of which, in their different ways, are manifestations of the sacred. We will mention briefly here a point which he makes about the "inward miracle". Having spoken of "the necessity for the irruption of the supernatural into the natural order"—and it is clear that by "supernatural" he means above all "divine"—he adds: "If 'God exists'—really and fully, and not as some unconscious and passive 'power' as the naturalists and deists would have it—then miracles cannot not be". He then goes on to say: "What is true for the macrocosm is equally true for the microcosm: if the miraculous exists outwardly, then it also exists inwardly. The microcosmic or inward miracle is that which manifests the Divine Presence in the soul: gnosis, ecstasy, the sacrament, sanctity, all of which are proofs of the possibility, as well as of the necessity, of an unimaginable irruption of the divine element".

To deny "from the Divine to the human", that is, to deny the Divine origin of man and of the world, is to reject religion altogether. To affirm the Divine origin is to accept religion in itself but not necessarily to accept a particular Revelation. In his final chapter, "To Refuse or To Accept Revelation", the author begins by examining the atheists' and agnostics' arguments which seek to defend and to justify those who in the past, like themselves in the present, refused to accept this or that Revelation. Characteristically he simplifies nothing and admits the complexity of some but not all of the situations. He makes it clear that the initial refusal of the pagan Arabs to accept Islam had no justification whatsoever. On the other hand, as regards the often made claim

that the Pharisees “had no reason for accepting the message of Christ, that on the contrary they had reasons for not accepting it” he says: “This is partly true and partly false, taking into account on the one hand the intrinsic orthodoxy of Mosaism and on the other hand the prophetic quality of the Christ”.

But he goes on to analyze the state of Judaism at the time of Christ, and this analysis brings to light the full gravity of the schism between the formalistic and outward yet nonetheless orthodox Pharisees and the Sadducees who, despite their heterodoxy, were in control of the Temple.

> Pure and simple logic is one thing, scriptural and semantic, or possibly moralistic, logic is another; the first operates on the basis of realities and concepts, and the second on the basis of words, then sentiments, even of self-interest. The contemporaries of Christ appear to have known or practiced rather the second type of logic, which alone can explain the unfathomable inconsequence, on the part of the Sadducees, of following a religious Law without believing in the hereafter, and the no less extraordinary illogicality of the Pharisees in tolerating the Sadducees in the Temple. Before accusing Jesus of the sin of heresy, the “doctors of the Law” would have done well to come to an agreement on their own orthodoxy; and since they were not in agreement, it appears that even from their own point of view, they had much to learn from Christ, and in this sense he remains, in principle, a Master within the very framework of Judaism. Within this framework, moreover, there was a third group, the Essenes, who were without doubt the ancestors of the Kabbalists and who were remarkably close to the spirit of Jesus; but despite this they did not become Christians, which evokes, theoretically at least, the saying in the Gospel: “They that are whole need not a physician”.

An argument of a different kind is now brought to bear:

> Subjectively one can turn away from a religious message for two reasons, one positive and one negative: one can turn away from it out of love for the truth—the truth in a given form—but again, one can refuse it out of hatred of true spirituality, of inwardness, and of asceticism, hence out of a kind of worldliness; this was the case with a great number of contemporaries of Jesus, who believed that they had established between God and themselves a *modus vivendi* well protected by formal rectitude, whereas in reality God likes to shatter and renew forms or the husks of things; for He wants our hearts and is not content with our actions alone. It is upon this aspect that Christ strongly insisted; too strongly in the opinion of the “orthodox”, but not too strongly from the point of view of the real needs of men.

> In any case, even if Europe had had no need of Christ, Israel would have needed Jesus. The Buddha reject the Veda, yet the Brahmanists accepted him as an Avatara; Christ did not reject the Torah, and the Mosaists could all the more easily—or with less difficulty—have accepted him as Prophet. In fact, Christianity seems to have done Judaism a service indirectly, just as Buddhism did for Brahmanism; not in the sense of a doctrinal influence of course, but in the sense that the new Revelation "catalyzed" the old ones and allowed them to become once again fully themselves, no doubt with some additional emphases.

The author goes on to consider the "absurdities" which are allegedly contained in Scripture and which make the Revelation in question incredible according to the unanimous opinion of all unbelievers. He takes pertinent examples from both the Bible and the Koran, and shows that in all cases the explanation is there—and must necessarily be there—for those who wish to see it. In the same context of "absurdity" he then considers, at some length, the apparent contradictions between one religion and another: "Certainly, God cannot contradict Himself in essence, but He can appear to contradict Himself within forms and levels; the phenomenon of multiple subjectivity is contradictory, but subjectivity in itself cannot be so, and the same holds good for certain scriptural passages or for the religions themselves".

It is indeed true that no man will say to another: "I am I and you are you", and still less will that other retort: "No, it is I who am I; in fact, I am the only I in the world". Nor will a third person conclude that both are wrong, and that subjectivity is therefore an illusion. Yet with regard to something that is parallel, namely the apparent contradictions between religions, whole nations have gone to war; and seeing this, the third party, that is the modern skeptic, concludes that if God existed He would not allow such contradictions and would make it absolutely clear which was right and which was wrong—whence the conclusion that God does not exist and that there is no such thing as revelation.

Schuon's answer is as follows:

> The plurality of religions is no more contradictory than the plurality of individuals: in Revelation, God makes Himself as it were an individual in order to address the individual; homogeneity in relation to other Revelations is inward and not outward. If humanity were not diverse, a single Divine individualization would suffice; but man is diverse not only from the point of view of ethnic temperaments but also from that of spiritual possibilities; the diverse combinations of these two things make possible and necessary the diversity of Revelations.

The chapter builds up in a remarkable way as more and more weight is thrown into the scale of acceptance. The author began by refuting and condemning the refusal to accept a particular

Revelation, namely that which is addressed to a man's own ethnic or geographic group and therefore to himself. But the exposition proceeds with a flow that is in a sense in step with the flow of time. As the cycle draws to its close—and we live beyond doubt on the threshold of that finality—it becomes more and more necessary for faith, if it is to survive at all, to establish itself on a wider and firmer basis. There are certain things that old men can see in virtue of experience and that relatively few young men can see, almost apart from the question of greater or lesser intelligence, and simply by way of contrast between experienced age and inexperienced youth. Now man today is old; and that eld cannot help seeing the disproportion between the immense claims that religion makes for itself and the ineffectual impotence of religion as, in the hands of its official exponents, it appears in fact to be. In many and perhaps most cases, skepticism is the result of this evaluation; but some men today, who in other ages would never have probed beneath the exoteric surface, are compelled almost despite themselves to sound religion to its esoteric foundation which alone is adequate to support the claims in question.

> The question may arise of knowing to what extent a believer has the right or the duty to recognize the spiritual worth or even the full validity of the other religions. In principle and a priori no such obligation could exist, for each religion possesses within itself everything man needs; but in fact and in the context of inescapable experiences, this question ultimately cannot not arise.… How can a man, who observes that his religion of birth or adoption is visibly incapable of saving the whole of humanity, still believe that it is the only saving religion? And how can a man, who moreover observes the existence of other religions, powerfully established and having the same claim, persist in believing that God, sincerely desirous of saving the world, should have found no other means of doing so than by instituting one sole religion, strongly colored by particular ethnic and historical features—as it must necessarily be—and doomed in advance to failure as regards the goal in question?… Doubtless these questions do not arise *a priori*, but in the end they do arise after centuries of experience. And the fact that they arise and that they greatly compromise religion which, it is clear, has no adequate means of answering them—this fact, we say, shows that they arise legitimately and providentially, and that in the religions there is, to the very extent of their exclusiveness, an aspect of insufficiency, normal no doubt but nonetheless, in the final reckoning, detrimental.
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> The divine origin and the majesty of the religions implies that they must contain all truth and all answers; and there, precisely, lies the mystery and the role of esoterism. When the religious phenomenon hard-pressed as it were by a badly interpreted experience, appears to be at the very end of its resources, esoterism springs forth from the very depths of this phenomenon to show that Heaven

> cannot contradict itself, that a given religion in reality sums up all religions, and that all religion is to be found in a given religion, because Truth is one.

It is fitting that this chapter should be the last, since Revelation is the final movement "from the Divine to the human", its purpose being to draw the human back to the Divine. The book ends with an exposition of what Revelation is in itself, and for what intrinsic reasons it is unrefusable. The author expresses his astonishment at the insensitivity of unbelievers and even of some believers, "that they do not perceive from the very first that the Psalms, the Gospel, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-gitâ could only come from Heaven, and that—from the point of view of credibility—the spiritual perfume of these Books dispenses with all theological analysis as well as with all historical research".

Parallel to this is the unbelievers' insensitivity to the appearance of the celestial Messengers themselves; and having quoted the formulations "he who has seen the Prophet has seen God" and "God became man that man might become God", he adds: "One has to have a very hardened heart not to be able to see this upon contact with such beings; and it is above all this hardness of heart that is culpable, far more than ideological scruples".

There are also certain compensations for those who are not privileged to meet the Messengers, and those compensations are likewise fraught with danger for the hard-hearted: "The combination of sanctity and beauty which characterizes the Messengers of Heaven is transmitted so to speak from the human theophanies to the sacred art which perpetuates it: the essentially intelligent and profound beauty of this art testifies to the truth which inspires it; it could not in any case be reduced to a human invention as regards the essential of its message. Sacred art is Heaven descended to earth, rather than earth reaching towards Heaven".

Ultimately it has to be said that for those who are adequate to it the most cogent reason for accepting the Revelation is given by the Revelation itself in its own quintessential message, esoterism, or more precisely in esoterism's very basis, the truth of what is often termed the Supreme Identity.

> The worth of man lies in his consciousness of the Absolute, and therefore in the wholeness and depth of this consciousness; having lost sight of it by plunging himself into the world of phenomena viewed as such—this is prefigured by the fall of the first couple—man needs to be reminded of it by the celestial Message. Fundamentally, this Message comes from "himself, not of course from his empirical but from his immanent Selfhood, which is that of God and without which there would be no "l", neither human nor angelic nor any other; the credibility of the Message results from the fact that it is what we are, both within ourselves and beyond ourselves.…To believe in God is to become again what we are; to become it to the very extent that we believe and that believing becomes being.

This sentence, which closes the book, would make a fitting close to our review. While letting it have the last word, let us simply add, by way of comment, a reference to what the author says, also on his last page, in explanation of “the mystery of Revelation, Intercession, Redemption”, namely that these are inevitable because, in its aspect of Mercy, “the Principle ‘loves’ manifestation and ‘remembers’ that it is Its own, that manifestation is not ‘other than It’“. Now what is said here of manifestation necessarily applies first and foremost to the quintessence of manifestation, that is, to man himself. and this very concentrated book whose every chapter unfolds an aspect of the title, may be considered above all as a claim addressed “from the Divine to the human” that the human is “Its own” and “not other than It”—a claim which, for those who “have ears to hear” will be no less than an imperative vocation.